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Becoming John Owen: The making of an evangelical reputation

Crawford Gribben

John Owen died on 24 August 1683, believing that the cause to which he had dedicated his life had failed.¹ After the restoration of Charles II, the gradual unwinding of the English revolution had been illustrated in the public torture of old republicans, the ejection of dissenters from the national church and their brutal persecution, and the formation of a new community of nonconformists that was quickly divided by disputes about the elemental doctrines of the reformation. Twenty years after the end of the revolution, it seemed clear to Owen that the puritan project of building godly congregations in reformed communities was in ruins. He was increasingly worried that the “minds of professors” had “grown altogether indifferent as to the doctrine of God’s eternal election, the sovereign efficacy of grace in the conversion of sinners, justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.”² He could hardly believe that those English protestants who had been shut out of the national church “should have come to an indifferency as to the doctrine of justification, and quarrel and dispute about the interest of works in justification; about general redemption, which takes off the efficacy of the redeeming work of Christ; and about the perseverance of the saints.”³ Growing old, facing bereavements among family and friends, and increasingly plagued by ill health, Owen had begun to doubt his legacy. Too much of his preaching, he feared, had been “poor, weak ... and perhaps ... quickly forgotten.”⁴ “I have now been very long,

¹ For more on the later stages of Owen’s life, see Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English puritanism: Experiences of defeat* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), chapters eight and nine.

² John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 16 vols (Edinburgh, 1850-55), 9: 327.

³ Owen, *Works*, 9: 459.

⁴ Owen, *Works*, 9: 332.

though very unprofitable, in the ministration of the word," he explained to his congregation in the spring of 1681, "I am ready to faint, and give over, and to beg of the church they would think of some other person to conduct them in my room, without these disadvantages."⁵ And he finally realized that the providential analysis that had been necessary to so much of his earlier work provided no effective theodicy to explain the situation of dissenters: "I do not know that [God] hath given me a greater rebuke, in the whole course of my ministry, than that I have been labouring in the fire to discover the causes of God's withdrawing from us without any success."⁶ Writing to a friend, shortly before his death, Owen reported that he was "labouring with age, infirmities, temptations, and troubles," and admitted "dreadful apprehensions of the present state of things in the world." God, he believed, was "withdrawing his presence from His Churches and other professors of the gospel."⁷ And the decline was to continue: shortly before his death, some of his work was publicly burned in the University of Oxford, over which he had once been vice-chancellor.⁸ Owen ended his ministry in defeat. But he could not anticipate his afterlife, for, in the early part of the eighteenth century, as nonconformists realigned with godly conformists to develop the new "evangelical" movement, new and diverse reading communities began to consume Owen's work and to establish his evangelical reputation.

I. The growth of a writer

⁵ Owen, *Works*, 9: 405.

⁶ Owen, *Works*, 16: 490, 492.

⁷ *The works of John Owen*, ed. T. Russell (1826), 1:423; *The correspondence of John Owen*, ed. Toon, p. 172.

⁸ Sarah Gibbard Cook, "A political biography of a religious independent: John Owen, 1616-1683" (unpublished PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1972), p. 383.

Owen's reputation was established in the dissenting and evangelical cultures of print. In his own lifetime, Owen had been an important voice in the development of Cromwellian institutions and in the emergence and sustention of Restoration nonconformity, but does not appear to have been an especially popular writer. Owen became an author when access to print was democratized in the early 1640s. His earliest work illustrated his occasionally unreliable grasp of Reformed orthodoxy even as it established his concern to defend truth as he understood it.⁹ His first few books were published in London by Philemon Stephens, an entrepreneur associated with the radical religious underground, but Owen self-published the sermons he preached after the siege of Colchester, *Eben-ezer: a memoriall of the deliverance of Essex, county, and committee* (1648), a gesture that may suggest that Stephens was no longer prepared to take financial risk on a relatively unknown writer in the increasingly crowded world of print. Owen enjoyed his first literary success in the sermon he preached on the day after the execution of Charles I, which was published, by one of Stephens' rivals, in two editions in 1649. The success of this pamphlet encouraged Stephens to package the unsold text blocks of Owen's earliest books into a single volume, which he marketed as an anthology of *Certaine treatises written by John Owen ... Formerly published at severall times, now reduced into one volume* (1649). As Owen ascended into public view in the early 1650s, his work found a more ready audience, with his political and devotional writing making more impact than those more demanding publications addressing the theological problems of the period.

Some titles proved to be an immediate success. *The advantage of the kingdome of Christ in the shaking of the kingdoms of the world* was published in London (1651), Oxford (1651) and Leith (1652), its wide circulation perhaps best explained by its

⁹ See, for example, the discussion in Crawford Gribben, *John Owen, baptism and the Baptists* (Dunstable, UK: Strict Baptist Historical Society, 2015).

rationale for the success of the Cromwellian invasion of Scotland. *Of the mortification of sinne in believers* was published in 1656, and reprinted in 1658 and 1668. *Of communion with God the Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost* appeared in two quarto editions in 1657, and was republished in a second, octavo, edition in 1700, the smaller and cheaper format indicating new expectations of how and by whom the book might be read. *A peace-offering in an apology and humble plea for indulgence and liberty of conscience* went through two editions in 1667, and *Exercitations concerning the same* did the same in 1671. *A discourse concerning evangelical love* was published in 1672, reprinted in 1673, and again in 1696. *A brief vindication of the nonconformists* appeared in three editions in 1680. Owen's exposition of Hebrews 6-10 was published in 1680, and reprinted in 1681 and 1684. *Some considerations about union among Protestants* passed through two editions in 1680, and his exposition of Hebrews 11-13 did the same in 1684. Owen's devotional and political writings were most likely to find a ready audience within his own lifetime.

Others of Owen's books took longer to establish their appeal. *A brief instruction in the worship of God* was published in 1667, and republished in 1676 and 1688. The exposition of Hebrews 1-2 was published in 1668 and went into a second edition in 1676. *The nature, power, deceit and prevalency of the remainders of indwelling sin in believers* appeared in 1668 and went into a second edition in 1675. *A practical exposition of the 130th Psalm* was published in 1669 and went into its second edition only eleven years later. *A brief declaration and vindication of the doctrine of the Trinity* was published in 1669 and went into a third edition in 1676. *An enquiry into the original, nature, institution, power, order, and communion of evangelical churches* was published in 1681 and went into a second edition in 1696. *A brief and impartial account of the nature of the Protestant religion* appeared in 1682 and went into a second edition in 1690. *The principles of the doctrine of Christ* was first published in 1645 and appeared in a second edition almost 40 years later, and again in 1700. *Θεολογουμενα παντοδαπα*, his

“biblical theology,” was published in Oxford in 1661, and was reprinted almost a generation later and for entirely new audiences in Bremen (1684)¹⁰ and Franeker (1700).¹¹ This extraordinary and compendious history of culture and religion does not appear to have attracted high prices in the second-hand market, even shortly after its publication. In 1665, for example, the book was included in a shipment of 116 standard medical, legal, literary and theological texts purchased by Chetham’s Library, Manchester, but was listed as one of the cheapest items in the shipment, costing 6 shillings and sixpence against the average item cost of approximately £1 8s.¹² In the challenging circumstances of the Restoration, when Owen’s most obvious audience was facing persecution and being monitored by government spies, his work had again become a risk for publishers.¹³

Owen’s ability to attract a posthumous readership may be indicated by the fact that some of these books were republished long after his death in 1683. These republished texts were indicating the kind of readers who continued to find Owen’s work interesting, and the various uses to which his ideas and his reputation were being put. But these posthumous publications are indicative of the trends by which aspects of

¹⁰ Johannis Oweni, *Theologoumena pautodapa ... De natura, ortu, progressu et studio verae theologiae libri sex ... Accedunt quoque digressiones* (Bremae, 1684).

¹¹ Johannis Oweni, *Theologoumena pantodapa sive De natura, ortu, progressu, et studio verae theologiae libri sex. Quibus etiam origines & processus veri & falsi cultus religiosi, casus & instarationes ecclesiae illustriores ab ipsis rerum primordiis enarrantur* (Franequerae, 1700).

¹² Matthew G. Yeo, “The acquisition of books by Chetham’s Library, 1655-1700” (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2009), 2 vols, 2: 370-80.

¹³ Gribben, *John Owen and English puritanism*, p. 215.

his distinctive political and theological were forgotten, as Owen was repackaged for new audiences and began the slow process of becoming an evangelical.¹⁴

II. A changing audience

Owen's later reputation as a devotional writer of choice for right-thinking evangelicals was fashioned by the texts that were republished in the decades immediately following his death. Setting aside the first editions of books that appeared in the years immediately after 1683, around a dozen of Owen's works were republished in the period before 1700. The content of this list is surprising, and illustrates the uneven processes by which Owen's reputation was being re-engineered, and as publishers attempted to anticipate his readers' changing tastes. Although we cannot assume that early modern audiences read as we do today, it is clear that publishers throughout the later Stuart period remained willing to take financial risks on his principal devotional works.¹⁵ By contrast, Owen's polemical works against Roman Catholics, Socinians and Quakers did not appear to attract a continuing audience, and later audiences consumed very little of his religious writing from the 1650s. Perhaps surprisingly, Owen's early catechisms, *The principles of the doctrine of Christ* (1645), appeared in a second edition in 1684, despite the fact that it had become unrepresentative of certain elements of his mature thought, especially in claiming that adoption was in some sense effected by baptism. *Of communion with God*, which had appeared in two quarto editions in 1657,

¹⁴ See also Samuel Rutherford - John Coffey, *Politics, religion and the British revolutions: The mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), pp. 257-58, for a discussion of the evangelical reception of Rutherford.

¹⁵ Jennifer Richards, "Useful books: Reading vernacular regimens in sixteenth-century England," *Journal of the History of the Ideas* 73:2 (2012), p. 262; Andrew Cambers, *Godly reading: Print, manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580-1720* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011).

was republished in octavo in its second edition in 1700. Owen's massive prolegomena, *Θεολογουμενα παντοδαπα* (1661), was unique in being reprinted for audiences among the European Reformed; while it was certainly not the last of his books to be marketed especially for overseas readers, it was quickly forgotten by English readers, being so technically and linguistically demanding. Similarly, *A brief instruction in the worship of God* (1667) appeared again in 1676 and 1688, and *A discourse concerning evangelical love* (1672) was quickly reprinted in 1673 and again in the very different political and ecclesiastical circumstances of 1696. The exposition of Hebrews 6-10 that was first published in 1680 appeared again in 1681 and 1684. *An enquiry into the original, nature, institution, power, order and communion of evangelical churches* (1681) went into its second edition in 1696. And *A brief and impartial account of the nature of the Protestant religion* (1682) appeared in a second edition in 1690.¹⁶ Of course, the many publishers involved in these enterprises were not making coordinated decisions about which Owen texts to republish. But they were at least gesturing towards their expectations about the changing reading and consumption habits of their target audiences.

For Owen's audience was changing. His congregation, after his death, was led by David Clarkson and Isaac Chauncy. Isaac Watts was appointed as Chauncy's assistant in 1699, and, after the senior man's resignation in 1701, became the minister. But over the next forty years, and from as early as the publication of *The Christian doctrine of the Trinity* (1722), Watts moved away from the theological position which Owen had articulated, eventually proposing doctrine which encouraged Unitarians to believe he had endorsed their own position.¹⁷ Owen's work found a new audience in members of a very different religious community: the Methodist movement advertised its marked hostility to high Calvinism even as John Wesley, one of its guiding lights, sought to

¹⁶ STC s.v.

¹⁷ Isabel Rivers, "Watts, Isaac (1674–1748)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v.

reinforce its enthusiasm for subjective piety by including some of Owen's devotional writing in the *Christian Library* (1750).¹⁸ The republication of Owen's writing in the eighteenth century confirmed the expectation of his anonymous elegist that his "Pious Pen" would "Preach to Multitudes of Men" in his "*Theo-Christo-Pneumatology: / And various Volumes more.*"¹⁹ For the elegist had correctly anticipated that the work by Owen that readers would find of most enduring value would include his volumes on the Trinity (alluding to the titles of several Owen works in referring to "*Theo-Christo-Pneumatology*") and the work of its individual members (especially his *Christologia* and his massive work on the Holy Spirit).

As London Congregationalists reconsidered Owen's truth claims, their fellow travelers in other locations remained appreciative of his contribution. Owen's work had a marked influence on American puritan writing. In New England, Increase Mather read Owen's work on the Sabbath,²⁰ Samuel Mather owned several volumes of his commentary on Hebrews,²¹ and Thomas Weld III may have been "typical" of colonial

¹⁸ Isabel Rivers, "John Wesley and religious biography," *Bulletin of The John Rylands Library of Manchester* 85:2-3 (2003), pp. 209-226; Karl Ludwig Ganske, "The religion of the heart and growth in grace: John Wesley's selection and editing of puritan literature for *A Christian Library*" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2009); Isabel Rivers, "John Wesley as editor and publisher," in Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp. 144-59.

¹⁹ Anonymous, *An elegy on the death of that learned, pious, and famous divine, Doctor John Owen, who dyed the 24th. of August, 1683* (London, 1683), single page.

²⁰ *Diary by Increase Mather*, ed. Samuel Green (Cambridge, MA: John Wilson & Son, 1900), pp. 33-34.

²¹ J. Tuttle, *Libraries of the Mathers* (Worcester, MA: The Davis Press, 1910), pp. 15, 75.

clergy in including several works by Owen in his library of 170 volumes.²² Jonathan Edwards was one of Owen's most active early American readers. He read and annotated his copy of *An enquiry into the origin, nature, institution, power, order and communion of evangelical churches* (1681),²³ and owned Owen's commentary on Hebrews (1680-88), which he cited on some thirteen occasions, lending several of its volumes to a colleague.²⁴ Edwards also cited Owen's *Pneumatologia* (1674) on six occasions, twice in *Religious Affections* (1746),²⁵ and referred to Owen's exposition of Psalm 130 in his miscellanies.²⁶ *Eschol* had reached its eight American edition by 1771, and *The death of death in the death of Christ* appeared in its first American edition in 1792.²⁷

Scottish readers also continued to appreciate Owen's theology, and his works became a staple of their religious publishing industry. A second edition of *An humble testimony unto the goodness and severity of God in his dealing with sinful churches and nations*, based on an Owen sermon on Luke 13, appeared in Glasgow in 1737,²⁸ with a

²² Harry S. Stout, *The New England soul: Preaching and religious culture in colonial New England* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), p. 91.

²³ Copy in Firestone Library, Princeton University; Edwards, *Catalogue of Books*, ed. Peter J. Thuesen, *The Words of Jonathan Edwards* 26 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 425.

²⁴ Edwards, *Catalogue of Books*, *The Words of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 339.

²⁵ Edwards, *Catalogue of Books*, *The Words of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 53.

²⁶ Edwards, *Catalogue of Books*, *The Words of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 455. Edwards' use of Owen is surveyed in Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The supreme harmony of all: The Trinitarian theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), see especially pp. 7-8.

²⁷ Bibliographical data is drawn from Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO).

²⁸ John Owen, *An humble testimony unto the goodness and severity of God in his dealing with sinful churches and nations: Or, The only way to deliver a sinful nation from utter ruin by impendent judgments*, second edition (Glasgow, 1737).

third edition following in 1758.²⁹ A third edition of *Phronema tou pneumatos, or The grace and duty of being spiritually minded* was published in Glasgow in 1756,³⁰ and was followed by *A discourse of the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer*.³¹ In the same year, another Glasgow printer published *Christologia*,³² which he followed with *The doctrine of justification by faith* (1760).³³ There was another flurry of publishers' interest in Owen in 1772, when *Meditations and discourses on the glory of Christ*³⁴ and *Christologia*³⁵ appeared in Edinburgh, and *Of temptation*³⁶ and *The nature, power, deceit, and prevalency of the remainders of indwelling sin in believers*³⁷ appeared in Paisley. This latter edition may have been that read in January 1779 by the wife of an Anglican rector:

²⁹ John Owen, *An humble testimony unto the goodness and severity of God in his dealing with sinful churches and nations*, third edition (Glasgow, 1758).

³⁰ John Owen, *Phronema tou pneumatos, or The grace and duty of being spiritually minded, declared and practically improved. To which is added, a short account of the author's life and writings*, third edition (Glasgow, 1756).

³¹ John Owen, *A discourse of the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer. With a brief enquiry into the nature and use of mental prayer and forms ... To which is added, three other treatises by the same author* (Glasgow, 1757).

³² John Owen, *Christologia; or, A declaration of the glorious mystery of the Person of Christ, God and man* (Glasgow, 1757).

³³ John Owen, *The doctrine of justification by faith through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, explained, confirmed and vindicated* (Glasgow, 1760).

³⁴ John Owen, *Meditations and discourses on the glory of Christ* (Edinburgh: John Gray, 1772).

³⁵ John Owen, *Christologia: or, A declaration of the glorious mystery of the person of Christ, God and man* (Edinburgh, 1772).

³⁶ John Owen, *Of temptation, the nature and power of it, the danger of entering into it, and the means of preventing that danger* (Paisley, 1772).

³⁷ John Owen, *The nature, power, deceit, and prevalency of the remainders of indwelling sin in believers* (Paisley, 1772).

"I hope to read it often, that I may transcribe it on my memory and note the many useful remarks contained in it."³⁸ Meanwhile, a new volume of collected sermons, *Twenty five discourses suitable to the Lord's Supper*, was published in Glasgow in 1774 and appeared in a second edition one year later, with a portrait of the preacher.³⁹ *Two short catechisms; in which the principles of the doctrine of Christ are unfolded and explained* had reached its twelfth Glasgow edition by 1783.⁴⁰ The market for Owen was now strong enough to support the production of more demanding work, such as *Christology* (Glasgow, 1790)⁴¹ and *Of communion with God* (Glasgow, 1792).⁴² *Pneumatologia* was published in Glasgow in 1791, and in a second Glasgow edition of two volumes in 1792;⁴³ in 1798 it appeared in Falkirk in an edition of three volumes.⁴⁴ An edition of *A brief declaration and vindication of the doctrine of the Trinity* appeared in Glasgow in 1798. These publications bore witness to a remarkable Scottish resurgence of interest in Owen – and its influence may have been felt elsewhere.

Owen's work on ecclesiology also began to circulate. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, these publications came to the aid of those Scottish Presbyterians who were working to resist the influence of patronage within the

³⁸ *The diary of Mrs Arabella Davies, late wife of the Rev. E. Davies, A. B., Rector of Coychurch* (London, 1788), p. 124.

³⁹ John Owen, *Twenty five discourses suitable to the Lord's Supper* (Glasgow, 1774; second ed., with portrait, 1775).

⁴⁰ John Owen, *Two short catechisms; in which the principles of the doctrine of Christ are unfolded and explained*, twelfth edition (Glasgow, 1783).

⁴¹ John Owen, *Christology* (Glasgow, 1790).

⁴² John Owen, *Of communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost* (Glasgow, 1792).

⁴³ John Owen, *Pneumatologia* (Glasgow, 1791); John Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 2 vols (Glasgow, 1792).

⁴⁴ John Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3 vols (Falkirk, 1798).

established church. *A view of the nature, order, & communion of the churches of Christ, as exhibited in the New Testament* was “extracted from Dr. John Owen's Treatise on evangelical churches” and included “an appendix on Scripture presbytery” (Edinburgh, 1797).⁴⁵ The same kinds of contexts and arguments supported the publication of *The true nature of a Gospel church and its government* (Glasgow, 1801).⁴⁶ In the 1820s, Scottish readers continued to be interested by Owen's work on practical divinity. An Edinburgh edition of *Phronema tou pneumatos: or, The grace and duty of being spiritually-minded* appeared in 1820.⁴⁷ William Collins, in Glasgow, published *The nature, power, deceit, and prevalency of indwelling sin* (1825),⁴⁸ with a second edition in 1827 appearing with a preface by Thomas Chalmers.⁴⁹ As Chalmers's identification with the Owen corpus suggests, Owen was being co-opted in the evangelicals' struggle against patronage within the established church, with an edition of *Two questions concerning the power of the supreme magistrate about religion and the worship of God, with one about tithes, proposed and resolved* appearing in Glasgow in 1833⁵⁰ and extracts from Owen appearing as *The right of the church, in particular congregations, to appoint and elect their own pastors and elders: clearly manifested from Scripture* in Edinburgh in

⁴⁵ John Owen, *A view of the nature, order, & communion of the churches of Christ, as exhibited in the New Testament: extracted from Dr. John Owen's Treatise on evangelical churches. With an appendix on Scripture presbytery* (Edinburgh, 1797).

⁴⁶ John Owen, *The true nature of a Gospel church and its government* (Glasgow, 1801).

⁴⁷ John Owen, *Phronema tou pneumatos : or, The grace and duty of being spiritually-minded : declared and practically improved* (Edinburgh, 1820).

⁴⁸ John Owen, *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of Indwelling Sin* (Glasgow, 1825).

⁴⁹ John Owen, *On the nature, power, deceit, and prevalence of indwelling sin in believers ... with an introductory essay by Thomas Chalmers*, second edition (Glasgow, 1827).

⁵⁰ John Owen, *Two questions concerning the power of the supreme magistrate about religion and the worship of God, with one about tithes, proposed and resolved* (Glasgow, 1833).

1841.⁵¹ Owen was not just becoming an evangelical – his literary legacy was being interpreted within the context of particular theological controversies. But other Scottish Presbyterians theologians found in Owen a useful foil. James Buchanan (1804-70) was one of a number of divines who continued to engage in a serious way with Owen's thinking in his dispute with Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788-1837) on the extent of the atonement.⁵² Their debate was followed up by a chapter-length discussion of Owen's reading of the atonement in John McLeod Campbell's *The nature of the atonement* (1867): McLeod Campbell took Owen as representative of his age before dismissing his conclusions.⁵³ Owen, a convert to Independent church government, was being co-opted by Scottish Presbyterians – and identified as someone whose work other more progressive Presbyterians might need to resist.

Elsewhere in the British Isles, publishers adopted a more eclectic response to Owen. Owen found new readers in the aftermath of the French Revolution. *The shaking and translating of heaven and earth*, which had been republished in Edinburgh in 1774, was reprinted in Belfast and in Monaghan in 1795, and again in Belfast in 1797.⁵⁴ And his work continued to be translated. His commentary on Hebrews was translated into Dutch by Simon Commenicq, a wealthy merchant in Rotterdam, who circulated it privately (Amsterdam, 1733-40), while other Dutch translations appeared throughout the nineteenth century. Owen's reputation was growing far beyond his native land.

⁵¹ John Owen, *The right of the church, in particular congregations, to appoint and elect their own pastors and elders: clearly manifested from Scripture* (Edinburgh, 1841).

⁵² Nicholas R. Needham, *Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: His Life and Theology, 1788-1837* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1990), pp. 186,188.

⁵³ John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, second edition (London: Macmillan, 1867), pp. 50-75.

⁵⁴ Three copies of this text are held in the Linen Hall Library, Belfast. Editions on ECCO.

III

But Owen never entirely lost his English audience. The slow move towards republication of his work in English centres of print may suggest that Owen's work continued to be consulted by means of second-hand copies. English readers put their older copies of Owen to heavy use. Some of the most interesting evidence of engagement and the transmission of ownership between English readers may be found in texts that are held in the Folger Shakespeare Library. Its copy of *Exercitations on the epistle to the Hebrews* (1674) bears marks of multiple ownership: Sam Sewall, who may have purchased or first read the volume in June 1688, appears to have transferred ownership to Addington Davenport before Samuel Eaton recorded his purchase of the book in Boston in June 1766. His ownership may have been followed by that of S. K. Smith, whose name is recorded in pencil on the rear of the front board, and whose ownership devolved onto Dr Abbot Smith, who donated the text to the Library. One user of the text attempted to work out, on the title page, how many years had passed between publication and his or her reading of the text – the answer being 166.⁵⁵ Similarly, the Folger copy of Owen's *Equiry into the original, nature, institution, power, order and communion of evangelical churches* (1681) has the arms of James Bengough of the Inner Temple, London, 1702, pasted on a fly-leaf; an inscription of "J. Jackson, August 20 1803" on an inside front page; and a modern sticker with "Hollycombe" and "J. C. Hawkshaw" inscribed upon it.⁵⁶ This copy bears few evidences of usage, other than a large "No!" written in the margin against Owen's claim that separation from a congregation could be justified in the case of the imposition of false doctrine upon its members.⁵⁷ Of course, much of this

⁵⁵ Folger 151. 390f.

⁵⁶ Folger 0764.

⁵⁷ P. 332.

inscription is ambiguous as evidence of how the text was used. Less ambiguous – though, from Owen’s perspective, rather more unfortunate – was the reading experience of William Abbott, who, in 1697, inscribed his copy of *Σύνεσις πνευματική: or, The causes, waies & means of understanding the mind of God as revealed in his word, with assurance therein* (1678) with a list of bonnets and cravats.⁵⁸ Similarly, the Folger’s copy of Owen’s first volume of the commentary on Hebrews is annotated in several hands, apparently over several centuries, with the most recent annotator spending considerable energy comparing the author’s chronological computations with those of Joseph Mede, using the margins to jot down lengthy numerical tables and checks on Owen’s Latin, while also preparing an additional contents page of matters of prime concern.⁵⁹ The copy of *The advantage of the kingdome of Christ* which is held in the Folger includes an inscription of an exchange of ownership between friends which dates from the early nineteenth century.⁶⁰ If English publishers were slower to reprint Owen’s works, therefore, it may have been because so many of the earlier editions were continuing to circulate.

But some English publishers were providing new material. A biographical note by Edward Williams introduced an abridged version of *An exposition of the epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1790).⁶¹ Its appearance was perhaps more explicable than the republication of *Οὐρανῶν οὐρανία, The shaking and translating of heaven and earth* (London, 1793). At the end of the eighteenth century, Owen was become a feature of the provincial press, especially in such traditional centres of nonconforming religion as East

⁵⁸ Folger 137959q.

⁵⁹ Folger 0753.

⁶⁰ Folger 133-795.5q.

⁶¹ John Owen, *An exposition of the epistle to the Hebrews: With the preliminary exercitations, by John Owen; revised and abridged; with a full and interesting life of the author, a copious index, &c. by Edward Williams*, 4 vols (London, 1790).

Anglia and the midlands. An edition of *Meditations and discourses on the glory of Christ* was published in Sheffield in 1792, with editions of *Pneumatology* and *The reason of faith* appearing in Coventry in 1792 and 1799 respectively. One generation later, London publishers produced an edition of William Orme's biography (1820),⁶² as well as texts of *A practical exposition on Psalm CXXX* (1824)⁶³ and *A treatise on the Sabbath* (1829).⁶⁴ In the same period, a movement away from hyper-Calvinism among English Baptists was dubbed by one of its proponents as "Owenism" – a signal of the extent to which Owen's reputation still functioned as a barometer of orthodoxy within some sections of English dissent and as a metonym for a more moderate and evangelistic Calvinism.⁶⁵

By the mid-nineteenth century, Owen was being represented as an exemplar for Victorian evangelicalism, even being identified with some of its peculiarities, including its zeal for the study of unfulfilled prophecy. In 1854, an anonymous editor published an Owen sermon as *Predicted events coming upon the nations of the earth*, and appended the text of *A most glorious Scripture prophecy*, by Owen's contemporary, Christopher Ness, in a literary pairing which reflected Ness' penchant for prophetic idiosyncrasies and, ironically, Owen's relative disinterest in this kind of speculation.⁶⁶ But those

⁶² William Orme, *Memoirs of the life, writings, and religious connexions, of John Owen, D.D., Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, and Dean of Christ Church, during the Commonwealth* (London: T. Hamilton, 1820).

⁶³ John Owen, *A practical exposition on Psalm CXXX* (London: J. Smith, 1824).

⁶⁴ John Owen, *A treatise on the Sabbath* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1829).

⁶⁵ John W. Morris, *Memoirs of the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (London: Wightman and Cramp, 1826); William H. Goold, "General preface," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850-55), 1: x.

⁶⁶ *Predicted events coming upon the nations of the earth; a sermon preached above two hundred years since ... by John Owen ... to which is added, A most glorious Scripture prophecy, by Christopher*

Victorian theologians who wished to interrogate the arguments of their seventeenth-century forebears could not avoid his presence. Charles Bridges, a Church of England minister in Cambridge, included a substantial discussion of Owen in his textbook on *The Christian ministry* (1830). Owen, he argued,

stands preeminent among the writers of this school ... His work on the Spirit (though discordant in some particulars from the principles of our Church) embraces a most comprehensive view of this vitally important subject ... for luminous exposition, and powerful defence of Scriptural doctrine – for determined enforcement of practical obligation – for skilful anatomy of the self-deceitfulness of the heart – and for a detailed and wise treatment of the diversified exercises of the Christian’s heart, he stands probably unrivalled. The mixture of human infirmity with such transcendent excellence will be found in an unhappy political bias – in an inveterate dislike to episcopal government, and (as regards the character of his Theology,) a too close and constant endeavour to model the principles of the Gospel according to the proportions of human systems. But who would refuse to dig into the golden mine from disgust at base alloy, that will ever be found to mingle itself with the ore?⁶⁷

Other adulation for Owen was more succinct. For C. H. Spurgeon, pulpit hero of Victorian London, Owen was the “prince of divines.”⁶⁸

Ness (London: Houlston & Stoneman, 1854). See also Crawford Gribben, “John Owen’s eschatology,” forthcoming.

⁶⁷ Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry* (sixth edition, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958), pp. 40-44.

⁶⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, *Commentaries*, *.

Spurgeon's accolade came as Owen's stock rose with the general resurgence of interest in puritan piety and theology which drove the publication of a large number of collected works projects. The publication of the Gould edition of Owen's works was part of a trend that also saw the production of the collected works of Richard Baxter, Thomas Brooks, John Goodwin, Thomas Goodwin, Thomas Manton, and Richard Sibbes, among others. This extraordinary enthusiasm of Victorian evangelicals for puritan literature nuances David Bebbington's argument that there existed a discontinuity between puritans and their evangelical successors.⁶⁹ Rather, as this evidence suggests, evangelicals invented the category of "puritan" in their search for a useable past. In fact, the veneration for Owen and other puritan worthies was so pronounced as to drive an extraordinary historical revision. In 1844, John Rogers Herbert, R.A., completed his famous painting, "The assertion of liberty of conscience by the Independents at the Westminster Assembly of Divines." The image is the best-known representation of the proceedings of the Assembly, but is notable for its lack of historical accuracy. Herbert, a convert to Roman Catholicism, was encouraged to work on the painting by a Congregational minister, James W. Massie, who provided an initial sketch of how the image might look. But Herbert's final result included representations of some of the most important Independents of the period, including Owen alongside John Milton and Oliver Cromwell, none of whom had been Assembly delegates.⁷⁰ Owen's inclusion was more than merely anachronistic. Of course, his reputation would suffer with the eclipse of interest in Puritanism in the later Victorian period, but, in mid-century, Owen was being identified as the single most significant theologian of the period. He was the

⁶⁹ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 42-50.

⁷⁰ The exhibited painting was noticed in *The Baptist Magazine* (August 1849).

puritan whose work defined the evangelical faith, and the evangelical by whose work an authentic Puritanism could be identified.

IV

Owen's canonisation as a Victorian evangelical exemplar was both a cause and consequence of the edition of his works edited by William Goold (1850-55) – an edition that, with the exception of one volume of writings in Latin, remains in print to this day. The ready availability of the Goold edition perhaps disguises the extent to which, for most of the period since his death, English readers have not been able to benefit from a standard text of Owen's works. In this respect, Owen's literary remains were unlike those of other puritan leaders, whose theological legatees rapidly produced complete editions of their works. Thomas Manton's death (1677) was followed by the publication of his complete works (1681-91); Thomas Goodwin's death (1679) was followed by the publication of his complete works (1681-96); Stephen Charnock's death (1680) was followed by the publication of his complete works (1684); John Flavel's death (1691) was followed by the publication of his complete works (1701); William Bates's death (1699) was followed by the publication of his complete works (1700); and John Howe's death (1705) was followed by the publication of his complete works (1724).⁷¹ But the first attempt to produce a complete set of Owen's works was made almost forty years after his death, in 1721. The editors of this project were all eminent Independents in London: John Asty (who wrote his biography for the edition), John Nesbitt, Matthew Clarke, Thomas Ridgley, and Thomas Bradbury. The consortium established a firm financial footing for their project, gathering 375 subscribers for the edition, including some very distinguished individuals, in a sign that Owen was emerging from the

⁷¹ Goold, "General preface," in *The Works of John Owen*, 1: xi.

reputational difficulties associated with his role in the mid-seventeenth century crisis. Nevertheless, they were only able to produce one of their projected volumes, collecting Owen's sermons, tracts and Oxford orations.⁷² Perhaps the most significant contribution of this edition was its prompting for John Asty to complete his biography of Owen, a likely "first draft" of which is held in manuscript in New College, Edinburgh.⁷³ This edition came to the attention of some important readers and collectors: the copy of this edition held in the Folger library, for example, was owned by the earl of Onslow.⁷⁴ Owen's celebratory status was sealed in the edition published by William H. Goold, which gathered almost three thousand subscribers, "a number almost unprecedented in the history of religious publications."⁷⁵ Goold's edition was strongly interventionist: he admitted that "the punctuation has undergone a thorough revisal," and that "no liberties have been taken with the text," but failed to explain why some texts were presented in their second edition forms, or in their first edition form but with their second edition preface.⁷⁶ Despite its editorial difficulties, and its thematic rather than chronological organisation, Goold's edition provided for a new appreciation of Owen's achievements.

For Owen's influence continued as evangelicalism continued to diversify through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. William Kelly, leader among the English Exclusive Brethren, praised the "excellent and learned Dr. John Owen."⁷⁷ Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch theologian, newspaper editor and prime minister, admitted

⁷² Goold, "General preface," in *The Works of John Owen*, 1: xi.

⁷³ New College, Edinburgh, MS Comm. 2; Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), p. 259 fn 3.

⁷⁴ Folger 219 349.

⁷⁵ Goold, "General preface," in *The Works of John Owen*, 1: xii.

⁷⁶ Goold, "General preface," in *The Works of John Owen*, 1: xiii-xiv.

⁷⁷ William Kelly, Appendix to the Notice of the *Achill Herald* Recollections, http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/kelly/8_Bt/achill2.html, accessed 28 January 2016.

to being “heavily indebted to Owen” in his theology of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁸ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who would become one of the most distinguished nonconformist preachers of the mid-twentieth century, was much inspired by the second-hand set of Owen’s *Works* that he was given as a wedding present in 1927.⁷⁹ In 1949, Jim Elliot, during his student days at Wheaton College, reflected on Owen’s arguments for “effectual redemption” as part of his growing rejection of Arminian and dispensational theology, and as he prepared for the mission to Ecuador which would end with him becoming one of the most famous evangelical missionary martyrs of the twentieth century.⁸⁰ Elliot’s discussion of Owen signals the extent to which members of the Brethren movement had preserved an interest in puritan writings within discursive communities which were often isolated from the broader cultures of evangelicalism.⁸¹ Elliot’s engagement with Owen is a useful reminder that the revival of Calvinistic theology among British and American evangelicals was taking place a full decade before the publication of *The death of death* by the Banner of Truth Trust (1958).⁸² J. I. Packer, who contributed a robust and energetic introduction to the new edition of *The death of death*, could hardly have anticipated the sea-change in evangelical attitudes to early modern Reformed scholasticism which he precipitated.

⁷⁸ Edwin E. M. Tay, *The priesthood of Christ: Atonement in the theology of John Owen (1616-1683)*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2014), p. 3 n. 8.

⁷⁹ Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years, 1899-1939* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), pp. 155-56.

⁸⁰ *The journals of Jim Elliot*, ed. Elizabeth Elliot (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1978), pp. 149, 294, 327.

⁸¹ “Exclusive” brethren, in particular, took an active interest in the dissemination of puritan literature – see, for example, Hamilton Smith, *Extracts from the writing of Thomas Watson* (1915).

⁸² Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The fight of faith, 1939-1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), p. 363.

Owen's appeal continued as the four hundredth anniversary of Owen's birth approached. The revival of interest in Owen's work has encouraged evangelical publishers to make a number of his most important works available in "updated English" even as scholarly output on Owen has blossomed.⁸³ Some entrepreneurs, recognizing his status in the new Calvinism, have rushed to identify an Owen brand: a brief search of the internet will demonstrate the broad range of clothes and crockery that now bear Owen's image. Three centuries after Owen began to be refashioned as an evangelical, evangelicals are increasingly fashioning themselves in his likeness – an irony that reveals as much about the commercial vitality of contemporary religion as it does about the making of Owen's evangelical reputation.

⁸³ See, for example, Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).